

# breaking ground

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## A Journey to Employment



Council on  
Developmental Disabilities

Dear Readers:

Welcome to the Employment Issue of *Breaking Ground* magazine!

Since 2013, when Governor Haslam signed Executive Order No. 28 establishing Tennessee as an "Employment First" state, *Breaking Ground* has dedicated an issue each year to employment experiences of Tennesseans with disabilities, to correspond with October being National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Since that time, Tennessee has made impressive progress connecting people with services that support exploration of competitive jobs in the community.

Inside this issue you will find stories about new government programs that lead to employment; new legislation in TN that gives priority to business owners with disabilities; postsecondary program employment internships and placements; and more.

Be sure to read about the TN Employment Roundtable, a monthly gathering of state agencies convened by the Council to share innovative programs and strategies for transitioning individuals from school, home or facility programs to employment training and jobs of their choosing.

As always, we love to hear from you, so let us know how you like this issue and the stories that you most enjoyed reading.

Wanda Willis

Executive Director



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**Cover Photos:** On the left, Maria Tatam's father Woody adjusts her cap for graduation. On the right, Maria receives her first paycheck from Lynda Englert, Business Office Representative at the Old Country Store. Photo courtesy the Old Country Store.



# A Journey to Employment

by Jennifer A. Graves, MS, Director, Union EDGE Program and Kevin Ung, MS, Assistant Director, Union EDGE Program

My first conversation about inclusive post-secondary education with anyone was with Mallory Whitmore, then the director of the IDEAL (Igniting the Dream of Education and Access at Lipscomb) Program at Lipscomb University. She told me that I should always begin with the end in mind: employment. Our end goal was set. One hundred percent employment in a field of the student's choosing.

I hired an assistant director and told him he was the employment director, and this is how we were going to do it. Maybe we were too naïve to know better? Maybe we just didn't know enough to be afraid of the goal, but that was it. We were going to work toward each person having a job; that's how we would measure our success as a program. And that's how our journey launching the Union EDGE program began.

## The Storyteller

Our first cohort started in the fall of 2015. We spent a lot of time getting to know our students and what they wanted out of life. We helped them to narrow their focuses. The one that was really puzzling to us was Maria. She was our "professional storyteller". What do we do for someone who wants to be a storyteller?

You go to the television production studio on campus, of course! Steve Beverly has been with Union University for many years, and has developed a great following in the local news media. When we first approached Mr. Beverly, he wasn't quite sure how this would work out for any of the parties involved. Maria has an intellectual disability, cerebral palsy and is legally blind. As the Sound of Music song says, "what do we do about Maria?"

In a very short time, Mr. Beverly discovered Maria's gift of memory. Maria did not read scripts - she memorized them. When Maria goes to nursing homes and elementary schools to read stories to the people there, she's not "reading" them, she's reciting them from memory. Maria has over 50 books committed to memory. Mr. Beverly was able to refer Maria to the health segment of Jackson



*Our students wanted to learn to how to work with flowers, so a guest was brought in to teach them about the care of plants. Maria inspects the sunflowers. Photo by Kristi Woody with UU.*

24/7, a 30-minute live daily news program. She did several segments for the newscast during her internship and course work.

## Learning to "do life"

The EDGE Program, like the other four inclusive post-secondary education programs in the state of Tennessee, has been developed for people just like Maria: individuals with intellectual disabilities who want to work and improve the quality of their life. Our students are highly motivated to learn new skills and to become more independent in their daily living.

Our program is set up to be either residential or non-residential. Most of our students do choose to live on Union's campus in our apartment-style residence halls. The EDGE students live with three "traditional" undergraduate students and five additional mentors are assigned to their "support group". Our students learn to "do life", while auditing two undergraduate courses and taking two Life Skills courses. All students are involved in a cooking lab on a weekly basis and have homework during the week. In year one, our students have on-campus internships and in year two, off-campus employment.

*Continued on page 4*

**Journey ...** *Continued from page 3*

## Living life to the fullest

Let's get back to Maria. Maria "Sunshine" Tatman has taught us a lot about expectations. She never expects any less than her best from herself, or from anyone else. She's a great self-advocate who wanted to work and to live independently. After trying out the television studio at Union, it was time for us to find Maria off-campus employment.

We approached Mr. and Mrs. Clark Shaw, owners of the Old Country Store at Casey Jones Village, the biggest tourist attraction in Jackson. They immediately said "yes!" We were thrilled! But then the question became, what can Maria do there? She started her tenure at the Old Country Store as an official greeter. She quickly became a local favorite with her personality and love of life – everyone wanted to talk to Maria. On Thursday nights a local bluegrass band plays at the Store. Before we ever knew what was happening, the band had taught Maria to play the spoons and the washboard. The band fell in love with Maria and Maria loved the band. The audience began to grow.

Maria is one year into her Old Country Store adventures. She graduated from our program in May. She and two other young ladies now live independently in an apartment in Jackson. Maria is living life to its fullest. She cooks simple meals. She has a ride to and from work. She is getting paid! But Maria is not the only one.

## More successes

Upon graduation, each of our seven graduates had job offers. They're receiving paychecks and have become productive members of their local communities. These seven young adults have achieved what every single college graduate (and their parents) desires: a job with a

paycheck. Taylor was offered employment with FedEx; Kelsie is with the West Jackson Baptist Church's Child Development Center; Mary is also with a local day care; Hannah is with Books-a-Million; Seth is with Academy Sports in Jackson; and Ethan is working for Sky Zone. Each of these scenarios represents a unique success story. We have been blessed!

These successes don't just happen, though. It has taken a lot of effort from our employment supervisors and our assistant director. We begin with the process of Person-Centered Planning. This involves lots of time and interviewing of the student and their "circle of support". We include family, friends and mentors. We get to know the student and their desires for their future; again, beginning with the end in mind.



*Maria with her parents, Beth and Woody Tatman.  
Jennifer Graves is in the blue sweater.  
Photo by Kriti Woody with UU.*

## Bringing value to the community

Our next step is to brainstorm what the ideal job location would be. Kevin Ung then hits the streets. He prepares a list of potential job sites and proceeds

to visit them with our student's profile in hand. Once he has identified several potential job sites, he sets up a time for our student to interview. We bring in support staff from our University to do mock interviews with our students.

Then our student does what every person does: interviews with a potential supervisor. We tell these supervisors that we want our student to bring a benefit to the job site. We want to bring value to our community partners. We don't want them to hire our students just to say they did.

Based on the feedback that we're receiving from our students and their supervisors, our students are living up to their end of the deal. We salute each and every community partner in the Jackson area that has taken a chance on one of our students. Thank you for believing in the goal!

# When Both Sides Benefit: *A look at customized employment*

by **Jeremy Norden-Paul, State Director of Employment & Day Services, TN Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**

Anyone who has ever experienced even a brief period of unemployment or underemployment knows the tremendous value that work plays in our lives. Having a job can help us achieve financial independence, provide an avenue to contribute to our communities, and give us an opportunity to build relationships with new people. Research also shows that we are physically and mentally healthier when gainfully employed. On top of that, having a job makes our economy stronger.

Across the board, businesses want to hire good employees who can help increase their bottom line, which makes having a job a perfect win-win situation. There is truly no shortage of reasons why every single person should have the opportunity to pursue employment opportunities in their communities.

Despite all of these reasons, if you have a disability, you are up to five times more likely to experience prolonged unemployment than someone without a disability. The fact is most people want to work, and most businesses are open to hiring employees with disabilities, so why do we continue to see such a large employment opportunity gap?

We could write an entire book (and many people have!) about the barriers people with disabilities face in the workforce. But instead of identifying barriers, why don't we highlight a potential solution? There is a proven strategy that can be a very effective tool for helping folks with disabilities find jobs where they can excel and help businesses thrive. This strategy can help provide the opportunity for every single person to pursue employment, earn an income and experience the many benefits mentioned above.

Customized employment, sometimes called job "carving", is a unique departure from the typical job search. Instead of looking for posted job descriptions and filling out traditional applications, a job seeker first cultivates a relationship with a business where he or she is interested in working. This is often done with the assistance of a "job developer", who can help make connections with local

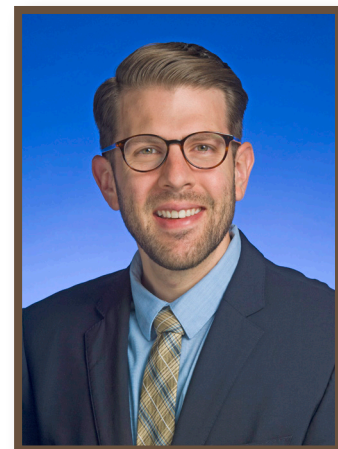
businesses and introduce the idea of creating a customized job that not only matches the skills and interests of the job seeker, but also meets the needs of the business, in a way that makes things run more efficiently and helps generate more money.

Through this approach, a job developer teams up with a job seeker and a business to do a couple of important things. First, the job seeker completes skill and interest assessments to figure out what he or she can currently do, is interested in doing, and/or wants to learn how to do. Second, the job developer works with the business to identify tasks around the workplace that could be "carved" into a customized job for the candidate. If it all works out, both sides benefit.

If you're wondering how this might work in real life, let's look at a couple of examples of how customized employment made it possible for someone to get a job.

After Joy was laid off from her non-profit job and spent several years looking for new work, she decided to enlist the assistance of a job developer. Although she had spent the first part of her career working in office settings, she wanted a change of pace and asked her job developer to help her land a job at her local Walgreens store. It was one of Joy's favorite community places and was always buzzing with people. Working there would also keep her active, meeting new people and learning new things.

However, like most retail stores, Walgreens used a standard job description that required all employees to perform all store tasks, including operating the cash register, which Joy did not feel comfortable doing. Rather than be deterred, her job developer negotiated with the



*Jeremy Norden-Paul*

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# Council Gathers State Officials Each Month to

by Lauren Percy, Public Policy Director, Council on Developmental Disabilities

As readers of *Breaking Ground* know, one of the main functions of the Council on Developmental Disabilities is working across state agencies to link programs and services that support individuals with developmental disabilities in more efficient and effective ways. In the area of employment, linking programs is particularly relevant as many different state departments offer employment services that can be difficult for customers to navigate.

In 2004 the Council started convening a group of representatives from just a handful of state departments to discuss coordination of employment services. From the start, two fundamental goals have guided the group: 1) doing a better job of supporting individuals with their employment goals, especially as they move through a complex service system; and 2) increasing employment outcomes among people with developmental disabilities

across Tennessee. These goals align with Governor Haslam's government-wide initiatives of effective and efficient customer- focused government and aggressive workforce development.<sup>1</sup>

Over the years, the Roundtable has steadily grown – not only in participation from the founding state departments, but from other departments who were not considered the “usual suspects” around the table for discussions about disability employment. Today the Roundtable is comprised of more than 20 individuals that represent 10 state departments (listed below) plus two of the Council's DD Network<sup>2</sup> partners, the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and Disability Rights Tennessee. The group's growth is reflective of the very complex system for disability

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tn.gov/governor/section/priorities>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tn.gov/cdd/topic/developmental-disabilities-network>

## Benefit ... *Continued from page 5*

store manager to consider a customized position for Joy, which included many of the important tasks the store relied on, but did not include cashiering. This was a true win-win situation; it would allow Joy to use her strengths and focus on tasks where she could be successful, while giving other employees more time at the cash registers.

After landing the job, Joy became responsible for a lot of work around the store. She provides customer service, stocks new products, rotates expired items, and does whatever else it takes to enhance the customer experience. She especially enjoys interacting with new people every day and staying busy. Her manager observed that Joy's customized job led to improved customer service throughout the store, reduced wait times at the cashier and overall smoother operations.

Kendrick already worked afternoons at a toy store, but wanted a second job to work in the mornings. With the help of his job developer, Kendrick approached his local pizza shop and asked about different tasks at the restaurant. The owner explained he was coming in extra early every morning to set up the restaurant before making pizzas and balancing the ledger. Kendrick didn't have any interest in making pizzas or counting money,

but he liked the idea of helping the owner set up the store every morning before heading over to the toy store. They spent some time brainstorming and came up with a customized job description for Kendrick. It included tasks like arranging tables and chairs, printing new menus, topping off the condiment bar, folding pizza boxes and setting up the musical performance stage.

The owner loves being able to arrive a little later each morning and spend more time focusing on other responsibilities, while Kendrick works on getting the restaurant ready for hungry customers. Kendrick enjoys earning extra money and contributing his skills to a local businesses - the free pizza's a nice perk too!

Joy and Kendrick are just two people, but their stories represent the experience of thousands of other people and businesses across the country who are benefiting from customized employment. It's amazing what we can accomplish when we push ourselves to think creatively, or when we just “ask” for something that wasn't necessarily considered before. While customized employment is not an overnight, magic solution, it's a proven strategy which shows us that all people are capable of working and making meaningful contributions to a business, and a community.

# Talk About One Thing: Disability Employment

employment services. The group's size is also a tribute to the value of the Roundtable's work to date.

The group calls itself the "Employment Roundtable" because the meetings are conversational in nature and very much designed to be round-robin style updates for shared learning and a safe space to air issues and questions. "We have an active two-hour discussion at each meeting," said Wanda Willis, the Council's executive director. "Every single month we uncover something we did not know that a state department is doing."

The group also started discussing "case studies" to problem-solve real life situations as a group. Through these conversations, the whole gathering begins to better understand systemic issues that no one agency can solve alone. With the goal of coordinating and making the entire service system work better, nothing compares to sitting around the same table.

What kind of things does the Employment Roundtable do, besides share information amongst each other?

- We generate opportunities for interagency agreements and joint training. For example, the group authored (and signed) a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to govern coordination across programs serving youth in transition from high school to adulthood. The Council serves as the oversight agency for the MOU. It is one of the lasting, long-term projects of the Roundtable.
- We link to other disability employment groups across the state. For example, the Roundtable serves as a smaller "steering committee" of sorts for the larger Employment First Task Force, established by Governor Haslam. In this regard, the Employment Roundtable facilitates the strategic planning and report writing related to the Employment First Executive Order that would be too difficult to do with the larger Task Force group. This is another example of an ongoing project for the group.
- We set a model at the state level for local cross-agency groups to follow. For example, in 2015 the Pre-Employment Transition Services program operated by Vocational Rehabilitation adopted the roundtable model for its pilot program in Jackson.



Their Roundtable also meets monthly to discuss local program coordination and case solutions.

- We host guest speakers to share best practices across state government. For example:
- Dr. Erik Carter, PhD of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center has worked with the Roundtable for many years to discuss shared employment data across state government.
- Jude White, executive director of the Governor's Children's Cabinet visited the Roundtable in July to discuss the "Single Team, Single Plan" initiative she launched to coordinate children's services across multiple agencies. A long-term goal is to implement a similar approach to coordinate disability services, particularly employment services, across multiple agencies.
- Jonathan Martinis, national legal expert with Syracuse University, visited the Roundtable in March 2017 to discuss Supported Decision-Making. Supported Decision-Making is a model that empowers people who seek assistance in making certain decisions about their lives to do so while retaining their rights as the ultimate decision-maker about those decisions, rather than seeking a legal representative to make such decisions on their behalf. The discussions with Jonathan are focused on state agencies' role in coordinating services

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**Council ...** *Continued from page 7*

effectively so that people get the support they need to be independent and empowered as their own decision-makers. The Council plans to bring Jonathan back in the fall to talk to the Roundtable about implementing the themes we discussed in March.

"The Roundtable is my favorite thing that we do," Willis said. "We have come to care about and trust each other personally, which has elevated our effectiveness when we work together on new initiatives and common problems. It is state government at its best."

**Roundtable members:**

1. **Council on Developmental Disabilities:** Led by the executive director and supported by the public policy director.
2. **Bureau of TennCare:** Senior staff from long-term services and supports
3. **Department of Children's Services:** Senior staff from youth independence programs
4. **Department of Education:** Senior staff from special education programs, plus a representative from the policy and legislative team (Individualized Education Account director)
5. **Department of Health:** Senior staff from Maternal and Child Health
6. **Department of Human Services:** Senior staff from Vocational Rehabilitation
7. **Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities:** Senior staff from employment services
8. **Department of Labor:** Senior staff from the workforce program and the youth training program
9. **Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services:** the assistant commissioner of Mental Health Services and senior staff from employment programs and youth programs
10. **Department of Treasury:** Senior staff from the ABLE Tennessee program, the college savings program, and the retirement savings program
11. **Disability Rights Tennessee:** executive director
12. **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center:** co-director



*Pictured from far left, clockwise around the table: Erik Carter, PhD, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center/TennesseeWorks; Roy West, Treasury Dept.; Jacqueline Johnson, Dept. of Health; Matt Yancey, Dept. of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services; Carrie Brna, TennCare; Paula Knisely, Dept. of Human Services/VR; Ruth Brock, Dept. of Human Services/VR; Elise McMillan, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center/TennesseeWorks; Jeremy Norden-Paul, Dept. of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities; Blake Shearer, Dept. of Education; Wanda Willis, Council on Developmental Disabilities; Alison Gauld, Dept. of Education; Brian Stephens, Dept. of Children's Services; Kisha Ledlow, Dept. of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services; Katie Lee, Dept. of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services*



# Building Work Skills

by Jennifer Wilson, MA CCC-SLP

Alex is seeking an administrative position in an office when he graduates from the FUTURE program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville this May. What kinds of skills will make him a successful employee? Skills such as conversing with fellow co-workers, managing tasks and repairing communication breakdowns could help him in the workplace and in his life beyond that setting.

Maggie, on the other hand, has just completed her first year of enrollment in the FUTURE program. She would like to work with children when she completes her post-secondary education. The skills identified that might help her be a successful employee were a little different. A focus for her might be managing her time and increasing her knowledge of child development.

The FUTURE program and University of Tennessee Hearing and Speech Center (HSC) worked together in developing an internship experience to address effective communication in the work environment. The program is called Preparing for the Social World of Work (PS-WOW). The FUTURE students spent 4-6 hours weekly at HSC working with Speech Pathology Clinical Instructors, graduate students, job coaches and HSC staff.

The University of Tennessee FUTURE program is a 2-year nonresidential program that allows participants

the opportunity to receive a Tennessee FUTURE program Vocational Certificate and, if all goes well, a job placement. The program provides them with individualized academic, social, vocational and independent living

skills and is designed for individuals ages 18-29 with intellectual disabilities and autism in eastern Tennessee. Individuals enter the program after completing high school.

AT UTHSC, our primary focus was on improved workplace communication, increased task management skills and job coach training. These priorities weren't identified immediately, but were developed as we began to see challenges and areas for potential growth. As our group dynamic progressed in managing everyone's role in the process, we began to problem-solve together.

Alex seemed to love the routine of coming into HSC on internship days, printing off his task list and working to complete each and all of the items listed. The tasks were fairly routine and similar at the beginning of the semester, but got more complex and longer as the weeks passed by. For example, at the beginning of the semester he frequently did shredding and computer rebooting. As those tasks got to be easier and more automatic, students and job coaches challenged him with creating professional emails or taking on job tasks from others.

Maggie quickly expressed an interest in training to work with preschoolers. Graduate students coached her in developing an interactive reading style and facilitating children's questions while reading. Individual treatment sessions were arranged outside of the internship to address improved reading fluency and comprehension.



*From front to back: Alex Brown, FUTURE intern and Philip Spurlin, Senior Electronics Technician/ UTHSC working on transferring videos to DVDs.*



*Left to right: Sara Joyce, job coach, Alex Brown, FUTURE intern and Jennifer Wilson, Clinical Instructor celebrating a completed intern experience*

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# Employment and Community

## *Supports for a full life that includes gainful employment*

by Lisa Mills, PhD

On July 1, 2016, TennCare launched the new Employment and Community First (ECF) CHOICES program. This is the first community support program for people with disabilities in the nation that is specifically geared toward promoting and supporting integrated community employment and community living as the first and preferred option for all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. People of all ages who have an intellectual or developmental disability (I/DD) can apply to enroll in the program. This includes people with significant disabilities. (See the end of this article to learn how to apply.)

The primary goal of Employment and Community First CHOICES is to provide people with I/DD the supports they need to live a full life in their local community. For people of working-age, this includes employment, as is typical for everyone who is working-age. While the program provides supports to people with I/DD who are already working when they enroll, the most commonly used employment supports are for people who aren't working when they enroll, but are interested in exploring and/or obtaining employment with help from the program. Less than 10% of working-age people who enrolled in the program in the first year had a job when they enrolled. Nearly 60% of working-age people who enrolled did not yet have a job, but did have a goal to explore or obtain employment. For people with I/DD who want to work, or are simply open to exploring work, this program may be their ticket to greater independence and a full life in the community!



*Jack will soon be starting Exploration. Photo by Donna Nasso*

TennCare and its partners in implementing Employment and Community First CHOICES are strongly committed to making gainful employment possible for every working-age individual who enrolls in the program. They don't expect every working-age person to have a job when they enroll. That's why ten (10) of the fourteen (14) employment services available through the program are pre-employment services - services designed to meet each person where they are and help them move forward on the pathway to gainful employment. This includes people with significant

disabilities who may need more support in order to work.

In designing the program, TennCare also recognized that many people and their families may still believe that employment is not for them, or is not possible. To address this, an "Employment Exploration Service" was created that provides individuals and their families with an opportunity to learn about employment options and get all of their questions and concerns about pursuing employment addressed by employment service providers. This service helps ensure that everyone can make a truly informed choice about pursuing employment. In the first year of the program, 82% of individuals and their families participating in this Employment Exploration Service decided to pursue employment after completing this service.

One of the things that can keep people with disabilities from working is fear of losing Social Security and other benefits if they work, or if they work more hours or earn more money. So, one of the benefits included in the new



# First CHOICES: inful employment

program is Benefits Counseling from experts who can help people understand the impact of working on their benefits.

The program also provides supports for individuals to access Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation Services to get assistance with achieving their employment goals. Support Coordinators for the Employment and Community First CHOICES program assist individuals and their families to successfully connect with Vocational Rehabilitation, and stay involved throughout the process to ensure good outcomes and well-coordinated services for the individual.

For individuals already working, Employment and Community First CHOICES also includes supports if people want to change jobs, get a second job or achieve a promotion to a better job with greater responsibilities and pay. Already, some people enrolled in the program have used Job Development and Career Advancement services to achieve these types of goals.

While employment is considered an anchor in a full and meaningful life, the program includes many other services that support community living, community involvement and valued community participation. Individuals of all ages make use of this broad array of services, which includes personal assistance, community transportation, supports designed specifically for families of individuals with I/DD, and supports for skill development at home, in the community and in the area of self-advocacy. Through a comprehensive, person-centered support planning process, individuals are assisted to identify all of the things they consider to be part of a full life, and to identify which services available through the Employment and Community First CHOICES program can best help them achieve that full life. For a full list of services available, visit:

[www.tn.gov/assets/entities/tenncare/attachments/MemberBenefitTable.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/tenncare/attachments/MemberBenefitTable.pdf)

In designing the program, TennCare also recognized that not all people with I/DD are the same, and that people will have differing needs for paid supports based on their disabilities and their access to family or community



*Tripp recently took the initiative to look up his work schedule online and send this to his support person without his parents knowing he had done that. He has been doing that every week since. (Photo provided by Waves, Inc., Provider)*

supports. To reflect this, the program contains three different service packages called “benefit groups”. While the kind and amount of services available varies based on your benefit group, all individuals enrolled who are working-age (16-62) have access to all of the employment services, with some pre-employment services available to youth as young as fourteen (14) years of age. Additionally, the service providers involved in delivering Employment and Community First CHOICES services are focused on assisting individuals to both preserve family supports and develop additional sources of natural support through fostering positive relationships with other members of the local community.

Between July, 2017 and June, 2018, the program is expected to grow by up to another 1,000 people. Go here for more information about the program: [www.tn.gov/tenncare/topic/employment-and-community-first-choices](http://www.tn.gov/tenncare/topic/employment-and-community-first-choices)

Go here to sign up by submitting the on-line self-referral form:

<https://tcreq.tn.gov/tmtrack/ecf/index.htm>

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**CHOICES ...** *Continued from page 11*

Go here to get help if you need help to complete the online self-referral form:

[www.tn.gov/didd/article/employment-and-community-first-choices](http://www.tn.gov/didd/article/employment-and-community-first-choices)  
(Please read the section titled, "Who can I contact if I need help filling out the self-referral form?")

Just one year into launching the Employment and Community First CHOICES program, TennCare and its partners have learned a lot about how to make the



*Evan began by volunteering and getting involved in workplace training.*

program successful. They keep listening to everyone who has ideas and suggestions to share, and are committed to continuing to make improvements that will enable the program to support individuals with I/DD and their families in achieving their employment and community living goals.

*Dr. Lisa Mills is an independent consultant and international subject matter expert on employment, person-centered home- and community-based services, and managed long-term services and supports. Lisa was instrumental in the design and implementation of the new Employment and Community First CHOICES program.*

**Building ...** *Continued from page 9*

Workplace communication can be very complex. Challenges often faced include knowing when to initiate "small talk", how long to engage in "small talk", and what exactly "small talk" is. How should you communicate to your employers about absences or progress on work tasks? How do you appropriately write an email, or respond to emails in the workplace? Enhancing these skills can help your ability to perform a job, almost anywhere, more effectively.

Task management was a very gratifying focus during the internship experience. With an ultimate goal of increased task initiation and completion, we began with more structure. At first, graduate students created task lists for the interns each day. As the semester unfolded, FUTURE interns began creating their own lists as each day ended in preparation for the following day.

Job coach training has been a "work in progress". We began by encouraging job coaches to step back as much as possible, and to not be overly concerned if the individuals they were coaching got frustrated or made mistakes. While some job coaches have an intuitive sense of when to provide guidance and when to "watch from the sidelines", others seemed to want to provide too much support. We were all learning together.

The PS-WOW program is just beginning and has great potential for growth. FUTURE students are developing



*From front to back: Maggie Carringer, FUTURE student, Alex Brown, FUTURE student, Madison Web, Job coach, Sara Joyce, Job coach, and Jennifer Wilson, Clinical Instructor.*

skills in effective communication in the workplace and beyond. Job coaches are learning how to facilitate growth in others. Graduate students in speech pathology are learning valuable skills in noticing signs of communication breakdowns and increasing effective communication.

*Jennifer Wilson, MA CCC-SLP has been a Clinical Instructor at the University of Tennessee Health Sciences Center (UTHSC) since August 2015. Prior to her work at UTHSC, she owned a private practice providing speech, language and feeding/swallowing therapy to children with a wide range of disabilities.*

# One Year ABLE

by Tennessee Treasury Department

ABLE TN recently celebrated its first anniversary and, with it, a full year of helping individuals with disabilities! Administered by the Tennessee Treasury Department under the leadership of David H. Lillard, Jr., ABLE TN is a savings program designed to help individuals with disabilities put aside money to pay for qualified expenses.

"The Treasury Department built ABLE TN based on the principles of sound financial management that Tennesseans expect," said Treasurer Lillard. "This approach has proven successful with tremendous progress. During its first year alone, the program has helped more than 1,000 individuals with disabilities save more than \$5 million."

That \$5 million and all future investments will grow tax-free for participants. With these tax advantages and the power of compounding interest, an ABLE TN account allows individuals with disabilities to save more towards qualified expenses that enhance their quality of life. These qualified expenses include education, housing, assistive technology, health payments and more.

Saving and its relationship to means-tested benefits has often been a major concern for individuals with disabilities and their families. While federal means-tested benefits can help assist with costs of health care, food and housing, maintaining eligibility can also be financially restrictive. To be eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), an individual with a disability cannot report more than \$2,000 in cash savings, retirement funds or other items of significant value. According to the ABLE National Resource Center, "For the first time in public policy, the ABLE Act recognizes the extra and significant costs of living with a disability." With an ABLE TN account, there is no impact on an individual's resource limit as long as the account balance remains less than \$100,000.

All U.S. residents with a qualifying disability that occurred before their 26th birthday can open an ABLE TN account, if they are eligible to receive SSI, Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), or have obtained a disability diagnosis by a qualified physician.

ABLE TN also empowers individuals with disabilities to join the workforce by extending qualified expenses to include employment support. An employee working with a disability

## Connecting ABLE Accounts & Employment

Recently, the LEAD Center, an entity that focuses on promoting innovation in policy, employment and economic advancement to advance individual and systems level change for all people with disabilities, released several resources on how having an ABLE account can assist a person with obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment.

A new policy brief entitled, "The ABLE Act and Employment: Strategies for Maximizing the Effectiveness of the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act as a Tool for Financial Stability and Employment Outcomes of People with Disabilities", demonstrates how provisions in the ABLE Act can be combined with federal benefit services and other federal programs and initiatives to further competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities. It includes recommendations on how to best utilize the ABLE Act to maximize these outcomes.

LEAD also coordinated a webinar titled, "The ABLE Act: A Tool for Financial Stability and Employment Outcomes", which focuses on how being an ABLE account owner can assist people with disabilities in building a stronger economic future and result in more positive employment outcomes. The policy brief, webinar and other resources can be accessed at: [www.leadcenter.org/news/lead-focuses-connection-between-able-act-and-employment](http://www.leadcenter.org/news/lead-focuses-connection-between-able-act-and-employment).

may use the savings from their ABLE TN account to cover transportation costs, job-related trainings, postsecondary education, moving expenses, and the many other costs associated with achieving and maintaining employment.

Additionally, family, friends and even employers can help an individual living with a disability grow this account. The maximum yearly contribution for an individual via gifts and personal contributions is \$14,000. Furthermore, gift contributions can be made directly to an ABLE TN account via check, electronic funds transfer and automatic investment plans so as not to impact an individual's resource limit.

The mission of the Tennessee Department of Treasury is to invest in the well-being of Tennesseans through exceptional financial leadership, management, service and education. We are proud to offer ABLE TN and excited to celebrate its growth.

*If you have any questions or would like to learn more about ABLE TN's impact on employment or otherwise, please visit [abletn.gov](http://abletn.gov) or call 855-922-5386.*

# New Law Promotes People with Disabilities Who Own Small Businesses

by Lauren Percy, Public Policy Director, Council on Developmental Disabilities

Are you a business owner? Or aspire to be a business owner someday?

If you own a business and have a disability, or if you know someone who does, then you want to know about a bill that quietly passed the Tennessee State Legislature this year and took effect on July 1, 2017.

What is now Public Chapter 485 started as an idea from a relatively new state legislator, Tennessee Representative Martin Daniel (R-Knoxville), who happens to be the father of a son who was born with muscular dystrophy. Rep. Daniel's idea was straightforward: "I want to support business owners who have disabilities." In collaboration with the Disability Policy Alliance (with representatives from the Council, The Arc Tennessee, Disability Rights Tennessee and the Statewide Independent Living Council), Rep. Daniel turned the idea into a bill - which became law with little debate and virtually no opposition within a matter of months. The bill was numbered SB 1224/ HB 1276, sponsored by Representative Martin Daniel (R-Knoxville) and Senator Becky Massey (R-Knoxville).

## What does the law do?

This law amends an existing Tennessee law to add people with disabilities to a program called the **Governor's Office of Diversity Business Enterprise**, known as "Go-DBE". The intent of the program, as the title suggests, is to support business enterprises with diverse business owners.

Go-DBE was aimed toward certain business owners specifically: people who represent minorities, women or service-disabled veterans – although the program does offer assistance to small business owners broadly, who apply and meet qualifications.

As of July 1, 2017, the program now includes **"businesses owned by persons with disabilities"** to the list of qualifying businesses.

That means people who have disabilities and who own their own businesses can apply to become certified with Go-DBE.

## What are some of the advantages?

- **It's easier to do business with the State.**  
Certification as a diversity business enterprise provides greater exposure for certified businesses to receive opportunities with the State of Tennessee.
- **The State can find your business more easily.** The names of all certified businesses appear in a Go-DBE Certified Directory and are posted on the Go-DBE website for all state agencies and departments to utilize when sourcing for goods, supplies, equipment, personal and professional contracts, construction and architect and design services.
- **Your business may get preference if all else is equal between you and another bidder.** Certified Go-DBE Respondents may be utilized as a preference to resolve Tie-Bid Responses.
- **Go-DBE holds events that help you network.** For example, in July, Go-DBE promoted an event with the East Tennessee Purchasing Association for a "Business Matching and Tradeshow" in Knoxville. Approximately 25 government agencies participated and 300 vendors attended the event. This is one of the best opportunities for businesses to meet governmental agencies in one place, create relationships to build future business opportunities, learn about "doing business" with the entities and to meet with private sector vendors.
- **You can get technical assistance** from the Department of Economic and Community Development Business Enterprise Resource Office.

## How does the program work?

The Go-DBE program is administered by the Tennessee Dept. of General Services. The program has a dedicated website, which includes all the steps in the process for applying to be certified as a business that will benefit



from the program. Steps include submitting forms via a state portal called EDISON and hosting on-site visits at your business. Visit [www.tn.gov/generalservices/topic/governors-office-of-diversity-business-enterprise-godbe](http://www.tn.gov/generalservices/topic/governors-office-of-diversity-business-enterprise-godbe) to learn more.

## What else does the law do?

Additionally, the law requires all state agencies to report on upcoming procurement and contract opportunities so that they can participate in the program. All state agencies have a “liaison” to the Go-DBE program, and all agencies must report to Go-DBE on the level of participation by each category of business owner.

## How was the law passed?

In theory, turning an idea into a law should be able to happen during one legislative cycle - but that rarely happens. Take the Autism Council bill passed this session, which became law through a long process that is more typical: first there were years of collaboration to solidify the very recommendation that there should be an Autism Council; then there were more years of advocating for its passage at the legislature. Rather miraculously, the bill amending the Go-DBE program to include businesses owned by persons with disabilities happened not just within one legislative cycle, but within one legislative session; that is, between the months of January and May of 2017, which is the first of Tennessee’s 2-year legislative cycle. It all started with Rep. Martin Daniel’s simple statement to the Disability Policy Alliance: “I want to support business owners who have disabilities.”

## Legislative champions

By way of a quick civics refresher: every bill must have at least one “sponsor” – i.e., a champion in the state legislature – from each chamber, the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Rep. Martin Daniel was quickly joined by Senator Becky Massey (R-Knoxville) in introducing the bill. And there was one other key sponsor to the bill who helped shepherd it through to become law: Rep. Darren Jernigan (D-Old Hickory). These three legislators and their dedicated staff made this bill possible, not only by sponsoring the bill but by offering powerful remarks to their fellow legislators while the bill was debated.

## Teamwork across the Disability Policy Alliance

It was a huge honor to be contacted by Rep. Daniel to consult on this bill. The Disability Policy Alliance utilized the unique expertise of each partner to turn the idea into reality: for example, we turned to Disability Rights Tennessee for the legal expertise to help draft a bill that would amend current code to add “persons with disabilities” to the Go-DBE program; we relied on the legislative experience of The Arc to help keep track of the bill through the legislative process (which consisted of more than 10 committee hearings across four different committees and subcommittees in the House and the Senate); and the Council on Developmental Disabilities, being the only state government agency within the Alliance, was able to coordinate among the state agencies involved.

Although the most obvious state agency involved with the Go-DBE program is the Tennessee Dept. of General Services, several other agencies came together to make the idea to add people with disabilities to this program a reality.

One rather serendipitous connection was with the **Tennessee Dept. of Economic and Community Development (TECD)**. In February, shortly after meeting with Rep. Daniel, the Council on Developmental Disabilities was meeting with TECD Chief Operating Officer Ted Townsend about disability employment in general. Mr. Townsend had recently participated in a National Task Force on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities alongside Senator Becky Massey. Moreover, he was assigned to a subgroup that focused on entrepreneurship for people with disabilities. By the time we mentioned the bill, it was clear Ted Townsend had already given thought to the same idea Rep. Daniel first had: how can Tennessee support business owners who have disabilities? Another champion for the bill was born.

Likewise, other departments, like us at the Council on Developmental Disabilities and our colleagues at the Dept. of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, were on-hand to lend expertise and support throughout the process.

Visit [www.tn.gov/generalservices/topic/governors-office-of-diversity-business-enterprise-godbe](http://www.tn.gov/generalservices/topic/governors-office-of-diversity-business-enterprise-godbe) to learn more about Go-DBE.

# Launching Youth from School 2 Life

by Ned Andrew Solomon, Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute™ Director, Council on Developmental Disabilities  
Photos by YLA Staff



*Hayes Otelo addresses his School2Life peers*

Promoting youth engagement, leadership skills and a positive life trajectory has always been a priority at the Council. In 2000, the Council began hosting the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), a four-day summer training for youth with disabilities on a university campus. Based on a curriculum established in California, the Forum taught the youth attendees from across the state – typically high school sophomores, juniors and seniors – about living more independently, options for life after high school, state services and resources, assistive technology and much more.

The Council moved away from this model of youth training in 2011, when it became obvious that families from across the state were having a difficult time transporting their sons and daughters to the middle of the state for this short residential event. In its place, Council Executive Director Wanda Willis and I began to look at other options. What if, instead of families bringing the students to us, we traveled around the state to offer youth training in different localities?

## Youth Readiness Days (YRDs)

Our first attempt to take youth training “on the road” became our Youth Readiness Days, a one-day, 4-hour workshop delivered in different high schools throughout the state. At these special events – “special”, because

the students attend this instead of their typical daily class programming – I would talk to the students about the importance of self-advocacy; the “reality check” of transitioning to adulthood; state resources and services that would be helpful for transition-age youth; and the need to develop a one-page plan that identified their attributes and skills, their “good day/bad day” scenarios, what was important to and for them, and the life activities that they would need support from another person, or the service system, to do successfully.

The Council has presented approximately 25 of these YRDs to date, the majority of them in East and West Tennessee. These trainings are still available, and are free, though we do ask the schools to print the YRD training handbook, and make arrangements for snacks and a lunch. For those who might be interested in having a YRD in a school near you, please contact me at 615.532.6556 or ned.solomon@tn.gov.

## Youth Leadership Academies/School 2 Life

A little over a year ago, the Council came up with a new youth training delivery model. In an effort to foster collaboration with the state’s Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and Statewide Independent Living Council – which share many of the same priorities as the Council and Developmental Disabilities Network agencies – we



*TARP Program Director Dora Warman, District 75 Representative Tim Wirgau and TARP Executive Director Denise Wardle*





*TARP Board Member and volunteer,  
Misty Foster*



*Danielle Perryman, Sean Reynolds, Keri Dougherty, Dillon Mathis and Hayes Otel*

proposed a 4-day non-residential Youth Leadership Academy that would take place in the region covered by each CIL. Like the YLFs and the YRDs, this program would emphasize planning for life after high school, developing self-advocacy and independent living skills, and information about services and resources in the community. In addition, each of these YLAs would promote the unique core priorities of the Centers for Independent Living and highlight local services and resources beneficial to youth transitioning to adulthood.

This past June, we piloted our first YLA with T.A.R.P., Inc. ("Training, Advocacy, Referral, Peer Support and Transition"), the CIL in Paris, Tennessee. Council and TARP staff worked together for six months before the program to develop the agenda and identify speakers – local and from other parts of the state – who could deliver the YLA competencies.

Since TARP's Executive Director Denise Wardle and Programs Director Dora Warman had already developed a close relationship with students with disabilities at area schools through their School 2 Life program, we decided to name this first Academy "School 2 Life" as well.

It was a packed agenda. Two legislators – Representative Andy Holt of District 76 and Representative Tim Wirgau of District 75 – told the participating self-advocates about the legislative process and the best ways to communicate with legislators. Lauren Hill, Director of Guest Services and Revenue Management for Tennessee's State Parks

(within the Department of Environment and Conservation) talked about employment opportunities at the parks. Jeremy Norden-Paul of the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities talked about figuring out what kind of jobs you want to do. Kathleen Turner with Commercial Bank gave a detailed "in-service" on opening and keeping track of checking and savings accounts, and the need to design a budget.

Other presentations addressed the history of the independent living movement, social media networking, local services and resources, post-secondary education programs and how St. John's Community Services encourages employment and community engagement. There were also sessions led by Council and TARP staff on self-advocacy, independent living skills and one-page plans.

As you can see, this entire training initiative was geared toward youth with disabilities moving beyond high school with a clearer vision of "what happens next", and the steps needed to ensure a positive and productive future.



*District 76  
Representative  
Andy Holt and  
Kathleen Turner  
of Commercial  
Bank*



# Council Selects 2017-18 Partners in Policymaking™ Class

The Council is very pleased to announce the selected individuals who will be participating in the 2017-18 Partners in Policymaking Class. Partners is a free leadership and advocacy training program for adults with disabilities and family members of people with disabilities from across the state. Participants learn about a wide range of disability-related topics, including building inclusive communities and classrooms, competitive and supported employment, supported and independent living, the state and federal legislative processes, assistive

technology and much more. An annual Partners Reunion Conference brings together Partners from the current class and graduates who have participated in the program since 1993.

For more information about the Partners training, or for an application for the 2018-19 Class, please visit our website at [www.tn.gov/cdd/](http://www.tn.gov/cdd/) or contact Partners Director Ned Andrew Solomon at 615.532.6556 or [ned.solomon@tn.gov](mailto:ned.solomon@tn.gov).

The 2017-18 Partners Class is:

Angelica Allsup, Cordova  
Carla Bourdeau, Murfreesboro  
Emily Bowlan, Arlington  
Sheila Carson, Hendersonville  
Kristie Clemmons, Jackson  
Roddey Coe, Chattanooga  
Jennifer Coleman, Paris  
Jennifer Duncan-Marin, Knoxville  
Clarisse Durnell, Nashville  
Erika Engler, Nashville  
Cheron L. Evans, Collierville  
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Gloria Huber, Cleveland  
Larry Huber, Cleveland  
Sadiatou Jallow, Knoxville  
Jean-Marie Lawrence, Chattanooga  
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Jonathan McGee, Maryville

Chrystal Murphy, Chattanooga  
Zennia Nesmith, Chattanooga  
Tracy Qua, Tullahoma  
Bill Radtke, Munford  
Christy Ray, Madison  
Robin Rogers, Old Hickory  
Sara Scott, Hixson  
Brenda Stroud, Charlotte  
Deborah Todd, Knoxville  
Zanon Williams, Memphis





## BG Arts 2017-18 Issue Invitation to Submit

**Do you write short stories, creative essays or poetry?**

**Do you paint, sculpt, draw or take photographs?**

**If so, we'd love to see your work for possible publication.**

*Breaking Ground* magazine invites you to contribute to our Annual Arts Issue for 2017-18. We will consider fiction, creative essays and poetry up to 1,000 words, photos and all other forms of artwork.

**Content is devoted to work by or about persons with disabilities.**

We will give published contributors a prominent by-line, a biographical note and copies of the printed magazine. Please include your full name, complete contact information, and a one-to two-sentence bio with your submission.

**All submissions are due by October 31st.**

**Please limit submissions to three (3) per person.**

Send your submissions, electronically, to: Ned Andrew Solomon at [ned.solomon@tn.gov](mailto:ned.solomon@tn.gov)



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Learn more about the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. | 615.532.6615 | [www.tn.gov/cdd](http://www.tn.gov/cdd) | [www.facebook.com/TNCouncilonDD](https://www.facebook.com/TNCouncilonDD) | [Tnddc@tn.gov](mailto:Tnddc@tn.gov)  
Subscriptions to *Breaking Ground* are free and available through the Council office.  
Contact us by phone or email with subscription updates or requests, and please include name and mailing or email address.

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